

"It is frightening to know that the company that has been the backdrop of our lives for decades would do this to us. For many, this is a life-threatening situation.

"My husband was diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma and had a heart attack in 2002. I was diagnosed with cancer 2 years before that. We have significant out-of-pocket medical expenses at this time, and the pension loss will put us in a very precarious position. We will not be able to afford coverage. Please pass legislation to ensure that they do not terminate our pension."

These and many other statements, over 2,000, were submitted to our congressional E-hearing at the Committee on Education and Workforce. This is what a real crisis looks like. Now is the time for Congress to act. Now is the time to do that.

I urge my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 2327, a bill that would put a 6-month moratorium on the pension terminations currently planned by United Airlines. During this 6-month period, Congress must act to stop companies from unfairly dumping their pension losses. This will allow United and its employees to negotiate a solution through the collective bargaining process. We must not let these hard-working Americans down. We must listen to these Americans. We must understand the tragedy that has befallen them and the financial situations that they have been thrust into after a lifetime of hard work on behalf of United Airlines.

KEEPING MARINES LIKE SECOND LIEUTENANT ILLARIO PANTANO

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, this past Friday I had the pleasure of attending an American Legion fund-raiser in Wilmington, North Carolina, where the guest of honor was Marine Second Lieutenant Illario Pantano. As you know, I have spoken at great length about Lt. Pantano and his dedication and service to the Marine Corps and to our Nation.

Friday was a day of excitement and disappointment for me. I shared in the joy with his family as they celebrated the dismissal of the charges against him. But it was also a bittersweet celebration as Lt. Pantano announced his resignation from the Marine Corps.

I know the future will bring much happiness for him and his beautiful family, but I was saddened to think that the Marines were losing such an outstanding officer because of such an unfortunate situation.

Mr. Speaker, I was overcome with emotion as Lt. Pantano gave me his officer's sword after he announced his resignation. I cannot bring the sword on the floor of the House because of the rules, which I understand. It is an

honor I unwillingly accepted but will always treasure.

As I look at the sword, I cannot help but think that this whole matter could have been avoided by a more thorough investigation and appraisal of the charges before an Article 32 hearing was held.

All along, I had confidence that the Marine Corps would ultimately come to the right conclusion and exonerate Lt. Pantano of all charges, and, thankfully, that has indeed happened. My only hope is that, in the future, if any other such allegations are to come forward about another member of our Armed Services, a more efficient and complete investigation will take place before this situation ever gets to the seriousness of an Article 32 hearing.

Mr. Speaker, our men and women in uniform are our Nation's defenders and heroes. We are blessed to have so many young, brave Americans willing to risk their lives in the name of freedom.

Lt. Pantano was an outstanding leader that I would be proud to call my son or son-in-law.

□ 1930

I believe his resignation is a great loss for the Marine Corps and a great loss for America.

Let us make sure that in the future we do not lose any more of our Nation's defenders the way we have lost Lieutenant Pantano.

Mr. Speaker, I will close by asking God to bless our men and women in uniform, I will ask God to please bless the families of our men and women in uniform, and I will ask God to please bless America and the future of this great Nation.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. JONES of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to yield to the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. DELAHUNT).

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I am sure that the good lieutenant has recognized what a wonderful advocate he has had here on the floor of the House. I think that the gentleman should be commended for his perseverance, for his integrity, and for all that he did, not just for this particular young man, but what the gentleman does in terms of the moral integrity of this institution. I congratulate the gentleman from North Carolina.

Mr. JONES of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is extremely kind, I thank him very much, and may God bless America.

THE NICS IMPROVEMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MACK). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York. Mr. Speaker, the NICS system, the National Instant Criminal Background

Check System, is the database used to check potential firearm buyers for any criminal record or history of mental illness.

In large part, NICS has been a success. Since 1994, more than 700,000 individuals were denied a gun for failing the background check. However, the NICS system is only as good as the information States provide. Twenty-five States have automated less than 60 percent of their felony convictions into the NICS system. In these States, many felons will not turn up on the NICS system and would be able to purchase guns with no questions asked. In 13 States, domestic violence restraining orders are not accessible through the NICS system. Common sense would dictate that you do not sell a gun to someone who has been served with a restraining order. Thirty-three States have not automated or do not share mental health records that could disqualify certain individuals from buying a gun.

Sadly, this particular loophole in the NICS system cost two of my constituents their lives. On March 8, 2002, Peter Troy purchased a .22 caliber semiautomatic rifle. He had a history of mental health problems, and his own mother had a restraining order against him as a result of his violent background. It was illegal for him to purchase a gun; but like so many others, he simply slipped through the cracks of the NICS system. Four days later, Peter Troy walked into Our Lady of Peace Church in Lynbrook, New York, opened fire, and killed the Reverend Lawrence Penzes and Eileen Tosner.

Peter Troy had no business buying a gun, and the system created to prevent him from doing so failed. It is only a matter of time before the system's failings provoke larger tragedies. We must fix the NICS system now.

While we lay the responsibility for the NICS system on the States, many State budgets are already overburdened, which is why I introduced H.R. 1415, the NICS Improvement Act. This legislation would provide grants to States to update the NICS system. States would be able to update the NICS databases to include felons, people with certain mental and emotional disabilities, and domestic abusers. It is actually enforcing the 1962 gun control law.

We need the NICS Improvement Act to become law, and we need more bills like this to be passed. These are ideas that impose no new restrictions on gun owners, but give the government the tools to ensure existing laws are effective and enforceable.

In fact, the NICS Improvement Act already passed the House in the 107th Congress by a voice vote. The bill had the endorsement of the National Rifle Association. Unfortunately, the other body never acted on the bill.

This is commonsense gun legislation we can all agree on. This bill will save lives while not infringing on anybody's second amendment rights.

Mr. Speaker, I call on the Congress to act quickly on H.R. 1415. If we can prevent a tragedy like the one that occurred at the Our Lady of Peace Church with a simple voice vote, why should we not do it right away?

**HOWARD DEAN AND WASTE,
FRAUD, AND ABUSE**

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I had planned to come down to the floor tonight and talk a little bit about some of the things that I had heard from the constituents in my district; but before I get to that, I have to address some of the comments that have been made by Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean.

Everyone knows that Mr. Dean has a reputation for making outrageous and inaccurate statements, and that is really no secret. But one would think he would have toned down the false statements and the unfounded insults, given his new role as leader of the Democratic Party.

In the past month, Mr. Dean has said the House majority leader ought to "go back to Houston where he can serve his jail sentence." Mr. Speaker, that is despite the fact that the leader has not been accused or convicted of a crime.

This past week, Mr. Dean said, Republicans never made an honest living in their lives. He actually thought that was a reasonable, responsible comment. And this is just so asinine, so juvenile, that it is hard to believe that the Democratic Party would choose him to lead their party.

Mr. Speaker, the next example is so awful and so incredibly sad, I really hate to repeat it, but sometimes it is the light of truth that is the only thing that will stop people from saying things like this. In February, while addressing a group of African American Democrats, Mr. Dean said, "You think the Republican National Committee could get this many people of color in a single room? Only if they had the hotel staff in here."

I cannot fathom what is going through his head when he makes comments like these. It is increasingly apparent that he is out of touch with America and with people who do not march in lockstep with his view. We should not just let these comments slide. He is speaking for one of the Nation's major political parties, and his comments are out of line. I am glad to see that several Democratic Members in the House and Senate have disavowed his remarks, and I would hope that minority leaders PELOSI and REID would join them.

If Mr. Dean would like, maybe we should introduce him to plenty of good, hard-working conservatives who have never been given a single solitary thing, people who have made it on

their own; people who have built a business, who talk about the sweat equity that is in their business, because they have not only built it with their heart, they have built that business with their hands. They deserve the same respect any other American deserves, regardless of the party, because they know what a hard day's work is all about.

Mr. Dean's attitude and his comments are exactly why his party has failed for a decade to win back either the White House or Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to end my comments today without discussing some of the things my constituents and I have been talking about back in Tennessee. Like many of my colleagues, I have spent a great week talking with people in my district and getting their take on what we are doing or not doing here in Washington. This is one of the very best parts of my job.

I learned so much from the listening sessions in my district. We talked about our military; we honored our veterans; and, Mr. Speaker, we talked about issues like government spending, illegal immigration, and waste, fraud, and abuse, which are at the top of the list. And it is waste, fraud, and abuse that I want to touch on tonight for just a few minutes.

I have been working over the past months to target the tremendous number of taxpayer dollars that get wasted each and every year right here in Washington, and I want my colleagues to know that the folks back home are talking about this issue. They want to remind us that government has a spending problem, and that when we spend wisely, we spend less. I heard time and again from my constituents, it is a spending problem, it is a spending problem that you folks in Washington have. You do not know how to say no. They know that when we spend less and when we spend wisely, everybody benefits, especially future generations; and they know there is plenty of room, ample room for reform when it comes to government spending. They support the President's plan to reduce and eliminate underperforming programs and agencies, and they support the budget that this Congress passed that reduces by nearly 1 percent discretionary nonhomeland, nondefense spending. They want us to make even larger strides in that same direction.

We know that rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse is not going to be an easy project; it will be a long-term project, but over the next few months, we will be coming back to the floor to talk just about that issue, and I invite my colleagues to join me.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2744, AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2006

Mr. PUTNAM, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 109-105) on the resolution (H. Res. 303) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2744) making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.J. RES. 27, WITHDRAWING THE APPROVAL OF THE UNITED STATES FROM THE AGREEMENT ESTABLISHING THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

Mr. PUTNAM, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 109-106) on the resolution (H. Res. 304) providing for consideration of the joint resolution (H.J. Res. 27) withdrawing the approval of the United States from the Agreement establishing the World Trade Organization, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

UNITED AIRLINES PENSION CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Ms. SCHAKOWSKY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I will submit for the RECORD an article in the New York Times entitled, "Pension Loopholes Helped United Hide Troubles."

The article, by Mary Williams Walsh, discusses loopholes in the current laws that allow corporations to grossly underfund their employees' pensions, and to do so legally. They use accounting tricks to give the appearance of healthy financial standing; and as Senator GRASSLEY says, "We saw similar practices and events at Enron but, unfortunately, this time it is perfectly legal."

These companies keep the poor health of their pension funds hidden from the public until they decide to terminate them, as United Airlines currently is doing. United knowingly underfunded its pension fund as it faced bankruptcy, shielding from its workers the truth about their retirement futures.

I would like to share two statements from hard-working people in Illinois who are personally affected by pension-accounting sleight of hand. These statements are from the more than 2,000 dedicated United Airlines employees and retirees who submitted testimony to the online hearing that the